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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAMAKO 000712

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [ML](#)
SUBJECT: DETAILS ON RECENT HOSTAGE RELEASE AND NEXT STEPS
FOR MALI-TUAREG NEGOTIATIONS

REF: A. BAMAKO 00666
[1](#)B. BAMAKO 00684
[1](#)C. 07 BAMAKO 00994

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) Summary: The Embassy met with Tuareg rebel Alliance for Democracy and Change spokesman Ahmada ag Bibi on August 4 to discuss outcomes of the July 18-21 negotiations between Mali and Tuareg rebels in Algiers. Ag Bibi said the Tuareg and Malian sides did not reach an agreement in Algiers and blamed the impasse on Ibrahim Bahanga's unwillingness to go along with propositions supported by the ADC. Specific stumbling blocks dividing the Tuareg camp include the placement of one 200 member special unit and a demand for a timetable for the implementation of the Algiers Accords. Ag Bibi said that if these issues, together with the liberation of approximately 89 Malian soldiers still in Tuareg hands, were not resolved by August 15, a follow-up meeting scheduled for August 20 in Algiers would likely be scrapped. On August 1 ADC member and Kidal Chamber of Commerce president Abdoussalam ag Assalat told the Embassy that the July 28 release of five Malian soldiers in Tessalit had nothing to do with the recent round of negotiations in Algiers and was instead part of a side-deal ag Assalat was working with the Malian government to win the release of a Tuareg who was among the AQIM members captured by a chance Malian army patrol in late May. On July 29 Assarid ag Imbarcaouane, who is the vice-president of the Malian National Assembly, a key Tuareg leader from Gao and a close advisor to President Amadou Toumani Toure, confirmed that President Toure's Head of State summit on Sahel-Saharan security would not occur until October "or possibly November." End Summary.

Algiers According to Ag Bibi

2.(C) On August 4 ADC Spokesman Ahmada ag Bibi provided a detailed summary of recent negotiations between the Malian government and Tuareg rebels in Algiers. Ag Bibi told the Embassy that Malian and Tuareg delegations reached a "verbal agreement" to liberate Malian soldiers held by Tuareg rebels, investigate the April 10 killings of Barka ag Cheikh and Mohamed ag Moussa, create one mixed military unit, de-mine the region of Kidal, and reduce the number of Malian troops stationed in the north. Ag Bibi said negotiations broke down due to a difference of opinion between the ADC and Ibrahim Bahanga over the location of the proposed special military units and a timetable for Algiers Accords implementation, with Bahanga pushing for a specific timetable over the opposition of the Malians, ADC and Algerians.

3.(C) Ag Bibi said that the Algerian mediators proposed

creating one special unit, composed of 100 Malian soldiers and 100 selected Tuareg fighters, under Algerian supervision and based in the town of Tinzawaten. This unit would be charged with observing a cease-fire agreement, overseeing de-mining operations, and facilitating the liberation of hostages and return of displaced populations. Ag Bibi said the Algerians selected Tinzawaten to appease Bahanga, who is based in Tinzawaten. The Malian delegation led by Minister of Territorial Administration, General Kafougouna Kone, disagreed with the idea of basing the 200 person unit in Bahanga's home town and recommended Bourghessa instead. ADC members led by Ag Bibi proposed housing the unit within the city of Kidal.

4.(C) Ag Bibi said Tuaregs suspected the Malians of trying to water down the mixed units by placing them under Algerian supervision. He said Malian references to mixed Malian-Algerian military patrols, which apparently stem from a mid-July meeting in Bamako between senior Algerian military officers and President Toure (Ref. A), amounted to nothing more than an attempt by Mali to "bury" the Algiers Accords by proposing a new solution not part of the original Algiers framework. It is still unclear who from the Tuareg side would lead a newly constituted mixed unit. Ag Bibi agreed that Hassan Fagaga, who was the previous special unit commander in Kidal until he deserted to join Bahanga in 2007, was no longer a viable choice. Ag Bibi said Moussa Bah was one possibility, and that a six person sub-group of Malian, Algerian and Tuareg military officers had been meeting on the Algerian side of Tinzawaten since August 4 to try to hammer out just who would lead a new mixed Malian-Tuareg military

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unit. This group includes Commandant Ibrahim ag Inawelane and Mohamed Mahmoud Bashir from the Tuareg side, a Lt. Col. Ould Meloud and Col. Camara from the Malian side, and two unnamed Algerian military officers.

5.(C) Ag Bibi said the next round of talks in Algiers scheduled for August 20 would likely be canceled if the Malian and Tuareg sides failed make any progress toward constituting the 200 person mixed unit and liberating the Malian prisoners by August 15. Everything, he said, depends on Algeria. He said that the Algerians needed to "reassure" the ADC and Bahanga that they would not lose any of their bargaining power by releasing the Malian prisoners.

The Prisoner Swap

6.(C) Kidal Chamber of Commerce president and part-time ADC member Abdoussalam ag Assalat told the Embassy on August 1 that he engineered the July 28 release of five Malian soldiers in Tessalit (Ref. B). These soldiers were captured by Tuareg rebels during the ADC's May 21 attack in Abeibara. The five individuals were among 31 prisoners held by rebels belonging primarily to the Taghat-Melet and Idnane fractions and loyal to Merzouk ag Acherif, Hamma Moussa and ag Assalat. This group now holds 26 Malian soldiers. According to ag Assalat, rebels loyal to Ibrahim Bahanga and the ADC are holding 63 more prisoners, bringing the total number of Malian soldiers still in Tuareg rebel hands to 89.

7.(C) Ag Assalat said the five soldiers were released not as a result of recent talks Algiers, but rather in hopes of securing the reciprocal release of a Tuareg captured by the Malian army in late May during a run-in with members of AQIM. Ag Assalat said the captured Tuareg was being held in Bamako and indicated that he was in the process of negotiating the terms of his release with Malian security officials. He also said that he was working on Merzouk and Hamma Moussa to release one or two more specific hostages with ties to certain individuals in Bamako. ADC spokesman ag Bibi confirmed that the July 28 liberation had nothing to do with

discussions in Algiers and were instead part of a quiet side deal between Malian officials and rebels belonging to the Taghat-Melet and Idnane Tuareg factions.

8.(C) The liberation of this group of five Malian soldiers appears to have passed unnoticed in Bamako. This is somewhat unusual given the Malian media's tendency to greatly exaggerate the number of prisoners either released or captured by Tuareg rebels. The nature of an apparent deal between one element of the Tuareg rebellion and Malian security services could explain this silence. Ag Assalat said he was concerned that rebels aligned with Bahanga or the ADC would not approve of his attempts to single-handedly secure the release of a Taghat-Melet Tuareg prisoner in Bamako. Ag Assalat has negotiated the release of Taghat-Melet and Idnane Tuareg prisoners before. In 2007 he told the Embassy that he had personally spoken with AQIM leader Moctar bel Moctar to secure the liberation of two Taghat-Melet and Idnane Tuaregs who were captured by the GSPC in October 2006 and subsequently written off by the primarily Ifoghas dominated ADC (Ref. C).

9.(C) Ag Assalat said he was less optimistic about the release of prisoners held by Bahanga and the ADC. He said that the Tuaregs were waiting for Mali to make the first move, presumably in the form of a draw-down in forces from outposts in the region of Kidal. Ag Bibi also seemed pessimistic about an eventual liberation of the remaining 89 prisoners.

View from the National Assembly

10.(C) Ag Bibi, ag Assalat and National Assembly vice-president ag Imbarcaouane all stressed that "nothing" was signed in Algiers despite international media reports to the contrary. Ag Assalat said the Algerians had in fact discouraged the signing of any agreement out of fear that this would encourage more attacks by new groups of marginalized rebels seeking to sabotage the process. Ag Assalat, who participated in the Algerian-facilitated June 22-26 meetings designed to regroup all of the various Tuareg

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rebel factions under the ADC banner, said it was still difficult to say whether Bahanga or ADC spokesman Ahmada ag Bibi was directing the ADC. He believed Bahanga had more leverage than ag Bibi. Ag Imbarcaouane credited ag Bibi for regrouping Tuareg rebels behind the ADC prior to talks in Algiers but said that President Toure expected Bahanga to control all of the disparate rebel movements.

11.(C) Ag Imbarcaouane said President Toure was reviewing a Tuareg proposal to create multiple mixed units based in Kidal, Tessalit, Tin-Essako, Tinzwaten and elsewhere. He said he had personally discussed this idea with the President within the past few days and that the Malians found the idea of multiple mixed units "excessive." He also said President Toure's oft-discussed and more oft-postponed Head of State summit on Sahel-Saharan security was now scheduled for October, "or possibly November," and would include as many nations as possible including the U.S., France and other non-African countries with an interest in Sahel-Saharan security.

Summary: An August 15 Deadline

12.(C) Although the July 20-21 talks between Mali and Tuareg rebels in Algiers ended amicably, discussions ran into familiar obstacles: disagreement over the liberation of hostages, the composition and placement of special mixed military units, the investigation of the April 10 executions in Kidal, the reduction of the Malian military's footprint in

the north, and Ibrahim Bahanga's unwillingness to compromise.

Judging from ag Bibi and ag Assalat's apparent lack of enthusiasm, unless Algeria can once again force Bahanga to accept an agreement in favor of the greater good, the informal August 15 deadline set by all three sides for the release of prisoners and the creation of special units will likely slip into late August or September.

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